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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CANBERRA 000665

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STATE FOR INR, PM, AND EAP

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TAGS: [AS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: MARK ARBIB: CLOUT-WIELDING ASCENDING LEADER

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Classified By: POLCOUNS JAMES F. COLE: REASON 1.4 (B)

Summary

¶1. (C/NF) Labor right-wing powerbroker and political rising star Mark Arbib has made a quick transition from the parliamentary backrooms into the Ministry. In Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's June 6 ministerial reshuffle (reftel), Arbib was promoted to Minister for Employment Participation and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery. Arbib, the New South Wales (NSW) Labor party's kingmaker, was integral in raising the numbers for Rudd to overthrow Kim Beazley as Australian Labor Party (ALP) leader in 2006. Arbib is a close adviser to Rudd and is his key conduit to the ALP factions. End summary.

Rising Star in the New-Look Rudd Ministry

¶2. (C/NF) Arbib, new to parliament, entered the Senate in July 2008 representing New South Wales. In February 2009, the former NSW ALP Secretary was appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Government Service Delivery, a position within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. He was promoted to Minister for Employment Participation and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery in Rudd's June 6 cabinet shake-up. Arbib's role includes assisting with the roll out of the government's infrastructure program and reforming the contracting of employment services. Before being elected, Arbib was the ALP State Secretary of the NSW branch from 2004-2007. He served as Assistant Secretary from 1999-2004, and was the ALP state organizer between 1996-99. Arbib was Acting Employment and Workplace Relations Minister when Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard was recently overseas.

Powerbroker and Adviser

¶3. (C/NF) Widely noted as possessing influence far beyond the ALP Right, Arbib successfully delivered crucial votes in Rudd's December 2006 defeat of Kim Beazley for the ALP leadership. Arbib was a key figure in the ALP's 2007 election campaign, and Rudd thanked Arbib in his victory speech on election night. Arbib had a similar relationship with former NSW Premier Bob Carr who in 2007 described Arbib as "one of the best campaigners in the business". Arbib is said to be loyal to, but frank, with Rudd, and is one of Rudd's closest advisers. Yet, publicly, Arbib has denied being part of Rudd's inner circle.

Personal Information

¶4. (C/NF) Arbib was born November 9, 1971 in Sydney. His father was of Libyan heritage and spoke Italian. The elder Arbib moved to Australia in the 1960s and became a property developer. Mark Arbib's mother was born in Sydney, and raised Mark and his brother after their father's death when they were young. Arbib has a Master of Arts in political science and economic history from the University of New South Wales. He is married to Kelli Field. The couple has two daughters, Alexandria, age three, and Charlotte, age one. Arbib is devoted to his children and sensitive that his wife, formerly the chief of staff for a NSW minister, is taking time off her career while their children are young. Arbib and his family live in Sydney.

Comment

¶5. (C/NF) Arbib is an influential factional operator who has forged strong political connections with Rudd. We have been told that Rudd respects Arbib's political expertise, and a contact noted that Arbib is brought into Rudd's inner circle when politically important decisions are made. It has been reported in the media that Arbib was involved in meetings which led to changes to the emissions trading scheme and Rudd's decision to embrace a budget deficit. The press has also said that Arbib is the only minister with a close ally as his Parliamentary Secretary, which could enable Arbib and Jason Clare, another newcomer, to make progress on getting public sector projects approved and built. Although Arbib has been in elected office only briefly, his meteoric rise has attracted only minor grumbling in Caucus since he has the talent to back it up. It seems only a matter of time before he moves into the cabinet.

¶6. (C/NF) Arbib is a tough political operator and

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evidence-based strategic thinker. He understands the mechanics of politics and how the factional system works. He can adeptly frame an issue the public cares about and knows the threshold he needs to hit to get a reaction. In the upcoming ALP national conference, Arbib will be instrumental in keeping factions working constructively together.

Comment Continued

¶7. (C/NF) We have found that Arbib is an astute observer and able conversant in the nuts and bolts of U.S. politics. He understands the importance of supporting a vibrant relationship with the U.S. while not being too deferential. We have found him personable, confident and articulate. A strong supporter of the alliance, he has met with us repeatedly throughout his political rise.